CD 2011--86

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra

David Briskin, Director of Orchestral Studies and Conductor
Jacqueline Mokrzewski, Piano

"The Romantics"

Thursday, October 6, 2011
7:30 p.m. MacMillan Theatre
Edward Johnson Building

2011-12 SEASON

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra

David Briskin, conductor

Prelude to *Die Meistersinger* — **Richard Wagner (1813-1883)**

Piano Concerto No.1 in E-flat, S.124 — **Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

Allegro maestoso: Tempo giusto--
Quasi adagio
Allegretto vivace--
Allegro marziale animato

Jacqueline Mokrzewski, piano
UTSO Concerto Competition Winner

INTERMISSION

Symphony in D minor — **César Franck (1822-1890)**

Lento - Allegro non troppo
Allegretto, ma non troppo
Allegro non troppo

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Program Notes

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883)
Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*
(1862-7)

The first idea for a comedy based on the Mastersingers came to Wagner in 1845 when he was just 32 and on vacation in Marienbad. He saw it as a counterpart to *Tannhäuser*, which he had finished three months earlier. Both are set in the German Middle Ages, both present known poets, and both draw on the same stories of E.T.A.Hoffman. Wagner made a first draft of the libretto at this time and concluded it with the now infamous lines: "Let the Holy Roman Empire fall apart, We still have our Holy German Art." Sixteen years later, in August 1861, he visited Nuremberg for a day. Not long after, while returning by train from Venice to Vienna, depressed that his passion for Mathilde Wesendonck was not reciprocated, he wrote: "I heard something like an echo of an overture to *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*." He told the publisher Schott: "It's transparent, yet pithy music," and sold publication rights to the opera for 10,000 francs. He then further sketched the libretto, completing it by January 1862. In mid-February, staying in the town of Biebrich on the right bank of the Rhine, he found the necessary creative drive. "During a beautiful sunset which transfigured the light as, from the balcony of my apartment, I contemplated a splendid view of 'Mainz the Golden' and the majestic Rhine streaming past it, the prelude to my *Meistersinger*, just as I once had previously seen it as a distant apparition rising from a mood of despair, now returned, suddenly clear and distinct to my soul. I set about putting the prelude down on paper and wrote it down precisely as is in the score today – that is, setting forth very definitely the main motives of the entire drama. Then I went on at once to work at the text, composing the scenes in due sequence."

So Wagner, with his vast, complex musical mind, without fully completing the book or even beginning the score of his opera, was able to write its overture in which he previews what is to come and lays out several of its musical themes associated with key characters. The prelude opens, resplendently in C major, with a theme and then a march associated with the guildsmen, bakers, cobblers, goldsmiths, grocers and the like. These themes stand in contrast with those associated with Walther von Stolzing, the young hero, and his attempts to win a bride. Suggestions of his prize song are heard. The Mastersingers stand for the archetypal national community, for tradition and maturity. Stolzing represents change, innovation and rebellion. Music for both sides of the conflict plays out in the prelude. Wagner adds in music associated with Hans Sachs, ("the supreme embodiment of the artistic spirit of the people"), the apprentices, and Beckmesser, representing "arid, narrow-minded pedantry." At the climax of the prelude, a single triangle stroke heralds Wagner's brilliant combination of three of the opera's main themes – the fanfare, the march and the prize song – in effortless polyphony.

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)
Piano Concerto No. 1, in E flat, S.124
(1835-56)

As the most subtle, complex and durable of musical forms, the classical concerto has inspired some of the best-loved masterpieces of the repertoire. Its evolution spanned more than a century – polished by Mozart, expanded by Beethoven, revived by Brahms. But surprisingly few of its structural thumbprints are to be found in the dozen or so works for piano with orchestra by Liszt. Soloist and orchestra remain, of course, but Liszt fundamentally re-thinks the relationship between the two. In his single-movement concertos, the piano conflicts more and





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PROGRAM

Steve Reich: *Dance Patterns* (Canadian premiere)
Steve Reich: *Mallet Quartet*
Toru Takemitsu: *From Me Flows What You Call Time* (arranged for two pianos and percussion)

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dominates more than in the classical concerto. The pianist becomes romantic hero, taking the piece by storm.

Although Liszt could improvise a virtuoso showpiece on the spot, he tended to worry over his more ambitious undertakings. It was a quarter of a century before the terse, unconventional theme he jotted down in 1830 was first heard by an audience as the assertive opening of his E flat Piano Concerto. Two years after coming up with the idea he reported: "I have prepared and worked out at great length several instrumental compositions, among others . . . a concerto after a plan that I think will be new and whose accompaniment remains to be written." Along the way to its completion, Liszt encountered Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy and the concertos of Henry Litolff. Both made a lasting impression on Liszt's vivid imagination. From Schubert, Liszt borrowed the single-movement telescoped sonata structure, with constantly evolving, highly contrasted themes, all based on a single melody. (He so admired Schubert's tautly argued Wanderer Fantasy that he made a concerto version of the work almost two decades after he first encountered it.) From Litolff, he derived the idea of Concerto symphonique, where the piano frequently elaborates the work's melodic ideas, while the orchestra develops them more thoroughly. Then, Liszt's pupil Joachim Raff worked on the scoring of the First Concerto to such a degree that he began to think of the orchestrations as his own work. Liszt first encountered Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* in the 1830s and saw how an *idée fixe* could be transformed from melancholic reverie in the first movement to demonic witches' sabbath in the finale. (He transcribed the symphony for piano.) Berlioz was to conduct a performance of this symphonic tour de force in the same program that Liszt premièred his E flat concerto (Berlioz conducting) in Weimar, February 17, 1855. What a concert that must have been!

The *idée fixe* that opens Liszt's E flat concerto is terse and made up of just three adjacent notes. It appears in many transformations throughout the work. It is soon massaged into a lovely descending theme in dialogue with clarinet, then violins, and then cello. Then it is turned upside down in a further metamorphosis, as the muted slow movement begins. Here, despite its brevity, the tender and passionate music unfolds on a vast canvas not unlike that of a Chopin Ballade. Again without a break between movements, the soft ring of a triangle takes us into a light-as-air scherzo where Liszt's theme is whimsically presented. A piano cadenza reintroduces the assertive opening theme and the woodwinds chime in with recollections of the gentler theme from the slow movement. Even here, the opening theme prevails as a drumbeat and soon blazes forth as the basis of the martial finale. Liszt's E flat Concerto remains one of the most popular works in the piano repertoire. Béla Bartók saw it as the "first perfect realisation of the cyclical sonata form with common themes, treated in the manner of variation form."

CÉSAR FRANCK (1822-1890)
Symphony in D minor (1886-8)

Franck, Debussy once said, "had the soul of a child, so thoroughly good-natured that he could look upon people's wickedness and the disorder of the world without a trace of bitterness." Franck's early years were dominated by an exploitive father who forced him to tour as a piano prodigy and demanded that he write fashionable *variations brillantes, grandes fantaisies, caprices, souvenirs* and so on, all of them unashamedly catering to the market place. When he married, Franck exchanged one dominating figure for another. His wife insisted that he write an opera, which failed miserably, due to the fact that the unworldly Franck lacked theatrical flair.

It was in the organ loft that his true creative spirit began to emerge. And it was to his organ classes that a circle of renowned pupils was drawn - D'Indy, Duparc, Chausson, Pierné,

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Roman Borys, *cello*; **Joel Quarrington**, *bass*

PROGRAM
Mozart: *Partita in E-flat major*
Mozart: *Serenade in C minor*
Dvořák: *Serenade in D minor, Op. 44*

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Lekeu and Ropartz were among them. Franck inspired intense loyalty; his teaching was open-minded and encouraging. His organ lessons at the Conservatoire soon became composition seminars and the next generation of French composers came to learn from their beloved 'Pater seraphicus.'

Franck's long apprenticeship led to an extraordinary flowering of late works, the music by which we know him today. The catalyst was one of his students, a beautiful, strong-willed French composer called Augusta Holmès who composed grand Wagnerian symphonies and operas. Franck's passionate Piano Quintet (1879) was the first work to result from the idealised love affair. He was 57. His music began to combine restless questioning with peaceful reflection. It was often heady and romantic. It made the more strait-laced and traditionalist listeners – and composers such as Gounod and Saint-Saëns – uneasy. A string of works for piano, organ and orchestra flowed from his pen, culminating in the Symphony of 1886-8. Franck's musical emancipation from the organ loft and late blossoming as a composer took longer than that of his contemporary Anton Bruckner. And Franck's aims in writing his only symphony were not dissimilar to those of the Austrian master of the genre.

His three-movement symphony combines the traditional goal-oriented, Beethoven-like progression – from darkness to light, from questioning to affirmation, minor to major key structure – with a less Germanic solution. From his fellow-countryman Hector Berlioz, Franck may have picked up on the idea of the recurring *idée fixe* throughout the *Symphonie fantastique*. From Liszt and such works as the E flat Piano Concerto, he derived the full-blown technique of presenting constantly evolving versions of the same basic ideas in ever-changing lights, with the music both circulating and evolving organically. The result of this synthesis of symphonic traditions is that, as in a Bruckner symphony, Franck relishes bold contrasts of mood, of colour and of tonality.

Franck plants the seed from which his symphony grows in the very first bar. It is a low, questioning three-note phrase that bears a strong resemblance to the first idea in Beethoven's last string quartet over which Beethoven wrote the words 'Must it be?' The phrase returns as the catalyst for each movement and as the unifying element throughout Franck's flights of fancy. A second theme morphs out of the three-note figure at the first really triumphant moment in the first movement. It is one of those radiant themes that circles back on itself several times and stays in the mind long after the closing applause has died. One of Franck's pupils called it the 'Faith motif' and it is to recur again in the finale in the thrilling conclusion of the work.

The structure of the work is logical and coherent. The middle movement is particularly cunning in that it combines the qualities of both slow movement and scherzo without either losing personality. The lovely, mournful *cor anglais* melody establishes the sombre character of the movement; the featherweight scherzo section provides a gentle contrast. Franck was particularly proud of the way that he was able to combine the two contrasting themes. The addition of bass clarinet as well as *cor anglais* gives the symphony much of its dark colouring and led to much criticism at the work's première at the Paris Conservatoire in February 1889. "No work that employs a *cor anglais* can rightfully be called a symphony," thundered *Le Figaro*. "It's the affirmation of incompetence pushed to dogmatic lengths," huffed Gounod. "It is arid and grey music, lacking in grace and charm," said the *Revue des deux mondes*. Franck took it all in his stride. "It sounded very well," he said, "just as I thought it would." Franck's symphony remains the most played French symphony in the repertoire.

— Notes © Keith Horner 2011. Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca

Biographies

One of the most highly respected and versatile conductors at work today, an insightful interpreter of works from the ballet, operatic, symphonic and choral traditions, **DAVID BRISKIN** was appointed Director of Orchestral Studies and Conductor of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra in July 2008.

Mr. Briskin is Music Director and Principal Conductor of The National Ballet of Canada, a position he has held since 2006. Prior to moving to Toronto, Mr. Briskin lived and worked for 23 years as a conductor and educator in New York City. For seven years, Mr. Briskin served as Conductor with American Ballet Theatre, leading performances at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York's City Center and in major opera houses throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas. He is a frequent guest conductor with such companies as New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and Houston Ballet, among others. For three seasons, Mr. Briskin served as Music Director for Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre and served as conductor for The Juilliard School's Dance Division from 1993 to 2005.

In addition to his work in dance, Mr. Briskin has enjoyed great success on the concert stage. He has conducted the Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Syracuse, Akron, Cincinnati Pops and Singapore Symphony Orchestras; the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Juilliard Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica, among others.

For six years he served as the Music Director of the 150-voice Masterwork Chorus and Orchestra in New York, a tenure highlighted by annual performances at Carnegie Hall.

Mr. Briskin's opera schedule has taken him throughout the U.S. and Canada including performances with such companies as Calgary Opera, Manitoba Opera, Opera Carolina, Lake George Opera and Sarasota Opera. He has also collaborated with the Orchestra of St. Luke's in New York, creating and conducting productions for their highly acclaimed Arts in Education series, and served on the faculty of the International Vocal Arts Institute in Tel Aviv from 1999-2005.

Over the years Mr. Briskin has been extremely active in arts education. For three seasons he was Artistic Coordinator and Host of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Education Concerts. He has given lectures for the Caramoor Summer Music Festival, the National Society of Arts and Letters and the Conductor's Guild and has participated on panels for the American Symphony Orchestra League and Chamber Music America. He has served on the faculties of Queens College, CUNY, the 92nd Street Y and the Mannes College of Music and had a ten-year association with Lincoln Center Institute for Aesthetic Education. Mr. Briskin attended the Indiana University School of Music where he studied voice, piano and choral conducting. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree in orchestral conducting from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and a Master of Arts degree in conducting from Queens College, City University of New York.

JACQUELINE MOKRZEWSKI started playing piano when she was three years old. By the age of eight she was competing in internatior competitions and at 12, she earned first prize at the New York Music Teachers' Association Piano Competition. In 2005, when Mokrzewski was 14 years old, she received a prestigious SOCAN prize at the Toronto Symphony Orchestra Competition. She went on to win the Toronto Sinfonietta Orchestra Competition in 2009, just before starting her music degree at the University of Toronto. In 2010 she was a semi-finalist in the 3rd Canadian Chopin Competition. Currently, Mokrzewski is studying with Boris Lysenko and completing her Bachelor of Piano Performance at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. She has been a recipient of the Alice and Armen Matheson Entrance Scholarship in Piano Performance.

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[illegible]reea Arbone
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VIOLIN II
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Minah Ahn
Adelaide Beach
Wesley Bells
Andrew Chan
Coco Chen
Philene Chen
Holly Cheng
Tania Cheng
Stelth Ng
Sebastian Sallans
Johnson Chung Shing Tam
Kyle Yuen
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Christopher Arnold
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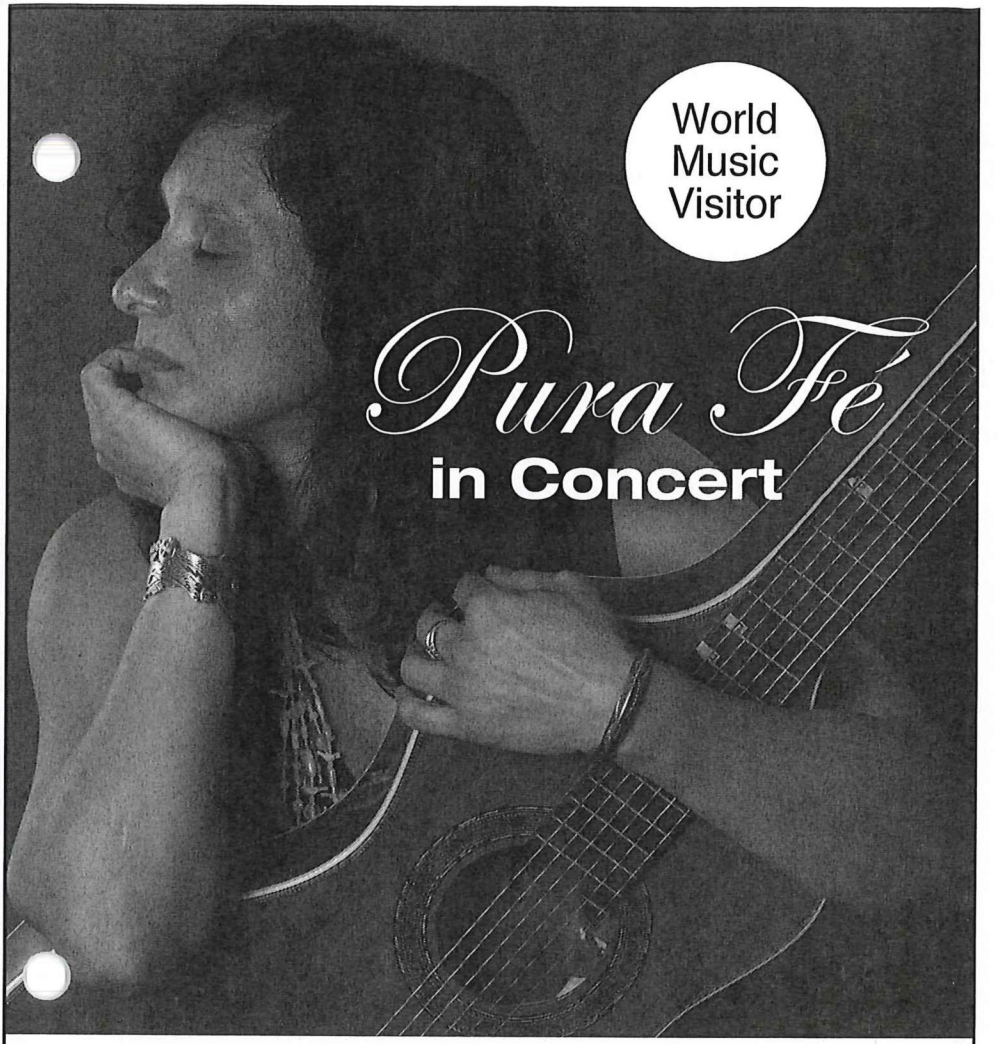
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She has performed on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, with the American Ballet Theater company, and in Broadway musicals and TV commercials. The "Renaissance woman" is the founding member of the internationally renowned Native woman's a capella trio, 'Ulali'. She is recognized for creating a new genre, bringing Native contemporary music to the forefront of the mainstream music industry and has won the Native American Music Award, a L'Academie Charles Cros Award, and a Juno nomination.

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